

SIMPLE, SAFE PACKAGING FOR MAILING SPECIMENS IN ALCOHOL¹

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ABSTRACT: Heat-sealed plastic bags provide protection during mailing for wet biological samples.

When mailing specimens in vials of alcohol, a frequent problem is how to package them to prevent drying while, at the same time, retaining any alcohol that might leak. The most common solution involves placing the vials in a wide-mouth jar which contains alcohol or alcohol-soaked cotton. This generally is workable but the extra alcohol and the jar often outweigh the specimens, thus increasing the postal fee, and, also important, the jar may leak.

Recently I had need to mail many samples of aquatic organisms in alcohol over a long distance. Regarding both specimen safety and economics, one packaging method has proven superior to all others tried. Instead of placing vials in a jar, I packaged them using a Dazey^{®3} "Seal-A-Meal." This small kitchen appliance is readily available and inexpensive. The plastic bags it uses come in a variety of sizes. Also, tubular plastic is available with which one can manufacture a bag of any desired length. The plastic has proven durable enough to hold unprocessed samples containing sticks and sharp stones without puncturing. Prior to sealing, most of the air in the bag should be pressed out to reduce homogenation of the sample due to constant shifting of position. The bags add no appreciable weight to the specimens and have the added advantage of being flexible, thereby allowing one to more efficiently box them for mailing. Boxes used for mailing should still be of strong, corrugated cardboard.

After more than a year of use, I can report this packaging method has survived the rigors of both cross-country and international mail and has also proven useful for packaging other types of biological specimens.

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